

Scripture

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OLD TESTAMENT SIGNS

The Editor has asked the present writer for an article on the use of various simple signs in the Old Testament, as focal points for the faith of the Israelites, and as illustrating the divine condescension to man's longing for external signs. I therefore venture to present to the reader some very simple considerations on certain signs of which mention is made in the Old Testament, choosing amongst many one or two which may be of special significance in relation to the Christian doctrine of the Sacraments. It will readily be understood, however, that even these few examples cannot be fully treated within the limits of this article.

The use of signs or tokens pervades the whole of human life, in our day as in the past, though the identity or nature of those signs may differ according to the time or the place. Broadly speaking, a sign is an action or a thing which has a meaning for us, differing from the action or the thing taken by itself. The Middle Ages used to express this clearly when its philosophers said that a sign is a thing by which we may know something else. Taken like this, signs may be natural or conventional: natural when they have a natural connection with that of which they are a sign; thus smoke is a sign of fire, and footsteps in the snow signs that someone has passed that way; conventional, when there is no such relation and the sign has been chosen at random to mean something else. For the most part signs are not chosen completely at random, because the human mind wishes to see some similarity between the sign and its meaning. But this similarity is not necessary, and is often completely lacking when a sign has been used over a long period. Nevertheless we may say that the distinction between conventional and natural signs is rather a distinction between different types than an essential one; transitional forms are possible and a sign may be partly natural, partly conventional. It belongs to the perfection of the human mind that it can invent and use signs, but the very use of them shows a certain imperfection, for if the mind could easily grasp things as they are in themselves signs would be superfluous.

The most common signs among men are the words they speak. Most words have now become purely conventional signs, but originally

many were more than this. Words have always been the sign *par excellence* for making known one's ideas to other people. Among the ancient Hebrews the word or name of a thing was thought to be something more than a purely conventional sign; the name was closely connected with the thing and almost a part of it, often expressing one of its characteristic qualities. Thus we read in the story of Paradise that the first man gave names to all the animals and that God stood by to see what he would call them. This was no idle or arbitrary game, for it thereby became clear that no animal could be the help God desired to give to Adam. The highest of all names was that of God: Yahweh, that mighty, awe-inspiring name which in later times the Jews feared even to pronounce.

Words spoken in solemn circumstances, such as words of blessing or cursing, and especially the word of God, were thought to be instinct with power. This primitive idea has not yet completely disappeared. A Dutch proverb says that he who speaks of the devil steps on his tail, which means that if you pronounce a person's name he may suddenly appear. There are many who still fear to pronounce the name of certain diseases, lest they be struck down by them. It is difficult to say by what mental or psychological mechanism words are thought to be so closely connected with things or events, that they are credited with power over them, or with a share of the power of those who pronounce them; but it is certain that the connection was felt by the ancient Israelites as a very strong one.¹ When Isaac had blessed his son Jacob in error for his elder son Esau, the effect of the blessing could not be taken away (Gen. XXVII.33).² In *Isaias* LV.10-11 we read that as rain and snow do not return to heaven but drench and fertilise the earth, producing fruits from it, so the word which proceeds from the mouth of God shall not return idle to its lord, having achieved nothing; but it shall fulfil and execute the will of God. A late text illustrates this as follows: "Whilst a deep silence surrounded everything, and the night rapidly reached the midst of its course, thy almighty word came forth from heaven, from the royal throne, as a grim warrior in the midst of the land doomed to destruction; as a sharp dagger it carried thy irrevocable command; whilst it stood it filled every thing with death; it touched heaven, walking on the earth" (Wisd. X.14-16). Thus a word, though essentially a sign, could

¹ The reason might be that the word is closely connected with the image of the thing, and in primitive thought the image is partly or even wholly identical with the thing itself. cf. J. Maritain, "Signe et symbole chez les primitifs", *Revue Thomiste*, 1938, pp. 299-330.

² If we interpret this story as a part of the whole book of *Genesis*, it seems clear enough that the author sees divine providence at work, choosing Jacob, i.e. the people of Israel, in spite of the sins and shortcomings of Jacob and his mother. It is nevertheless clear that in the old folk-tale the power of the blessing played its part.

be more ; it could be instinct with power, and bring to pass what it symbolised.

There were many signs and symbols beside those belonging to language, though language very often accompanied them as their complement. There was, for instance, the covenant. When a covenant was made, a sign was chosen to be its token. The sign was like a silent witness, continually recalling the covenant. In Babylonia no contract was valid unless it had been written on a tablet and duly sealed. People like Laban and Jacob acted in a more primitive way : having concluded a treaty they heaped up stones and called the crude monument "the heap of witness" (Gen. XXXI.47). This heap of stones was to remind later generations of what had taken place. When God made a covenant with men, signs of that covenant were determined. But before speaking of these signs we must speak of what "covenant" meant for the ancient Israelites.¹ It must be explained in relation to the social customs of the world in which the patriarchs and the people of Israel lived. Amongst the nomad tribes of the Arabian Desert there was, and perhaps there still is, a state of latent war, or more exactly of absence of peace. Within the family, clan or tribe (and clan and tribe were thought of as big families) ruled the ties of kinship. Here there was a solidarity which obliged everyone to help his "brother", and it was considered normal that the individual should share the fate of the community. Within the totality of the family there was peace. But there was no such peace in their relations with others unless a covenant had been made with them. The stranger was always the enemy, real or potential, and in many languages the word for stranger or foreigner is the same as that for enemy.² It is abundantly clear that in the world in which ancient Israel lived, or had lived in still earlier times, and which was afterwards considered as an ideal one (just as the civilised modern Arab idealises the life of the Bedouin in the desert), the absence of peace between tribes and peoples was considered normal. Only a pact or covenant could change this ; it established a solidarity and a common interest between those who had previously nothing in common, not even the same human rights. There was, moreover, the possibility of a man having to flee from his

¹ Modern theologians often explain the word in accordance not with Israelite ideas, but with their own, and sometimes go so far as to clothe it with modern existentialist thought. For modern man it is strange that God should conclude a covenant or treaty with men, since to our mind this can only be concluded on a basis of a certain equality. There is no equality between God and man, and when God manifested His will, as He did when offering a covenant to the Patriarchs or to Israel, they were physically free to refuse, but morally bound to accept.

² In Hebrew *nokri* means stranger, but the related *nakru* in Accadian means enemy ; the Latin word *hostis* originally meant stranger, but more commonly signifies enemy.

own family or clan or tribe ; if he lived in the desert alone he would be like Cain after he had killed his brother ; as a stranger to everybody, his life and his possessions would be at anybody's mercy. In order to avoid this miserable state so like to death, he would seek the protection of a powerful man. He would take refuge in his tent and protection would normally be granted him ; then a covenant could be made by which the refugee became, quite artificially, a member of the family of the protector. He would be obliged for his part to accept the rules and customs of the community of which he had become a member. This explains the type of relationship which God established with men when He made a covenant with them. Israel did not flee to God, but God came to their rescue ; He offered His covenant and the people freely accepted it.

The first covenant mentioned in the Bible is that which God made with creation after the great flood. God had destroyed humanity, because men had separated themselves from God and thus the state of peace which had existed in Paradise had come to an end. After the flood He is represented as resolving to do this no more ; to assure humanity of this He made a covenant, by which an end was put to the enmity between God and men which had caused the flood : "I establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the water of the flood, neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. IX.9-11). The covenant had also a sign, the rainbow, which links heaven and earth, the abode of God and that of men, and which appears in the clouds after the storm. From now on the rainbow had the character of a sign ; it was a reminder of this covenant. This is probably a theological reflection of a later time, expressing in the form of a covenant the theological truth concerning what had happened, with the rainbow as a very apt sign of it.

The second covenant mentioned in the book of *Genesis* is that of God with Abraham, the first and ideal ancestor of the Israelites. This covenant, first mentioned in *Genesis* XV.18 (J) and then in XVII.2 (P) is presented as a unilateral promise made by God and accepted by Abraham who believed in God. The covenant contained moreover a commandment, which was also its sign. Abraham must be circumcised with all his descendants, and even the male slaves belonging to them. Circumcision was to be a fundamental law in the society of which God was the father and protector. The Israelites knew that it was practised by other peoples such as the Egyptians. But among the people of God it acquired a new meaning, that of a divine command expressly given to Abraham and through him to the whole of Israel ; of its nature it was also an apt token of the indestructibility of the

bond between those who were His by covenant and promise. Much has been written about the original meaning of circumcision. It seems probable that among many peoples or tribes it is an initiation ceremony by which a boy attains the status of manhood; this may have been its original signification among the early Semites. But in Israel it was performed when the child was only eight days old, and this was perhaps peculiar to the Israelites.¹ Its special practice in Israel on the eighth day was at the same time a token of the covenant. Was it also the token of a special relationship set up between God and the individual? This question seems out of place in the Old Testament, for the covenant with Abraham and his offspring who formed the people of Israel, was not with the individual as such. Though each individual had to observe the commandment of circumcision (cf. Gen. xvii.10), the people formed a unity, or corporate personality as it has been called, and it was with the people as a unity that the covenant was made. If any individual refused to observe the commandment, and if he were not, for this refusal, cut off (killed or eliminated) from the community, then the whole community was responsible for breaking the covenant. So the covenant was made with the individual in and through the group, not with the individual directly. Thus it is quite superfluous to ask why girls were not circumcised, as they are in certain savage tribes. Only the males represented the people in the covenant with God, and circumcision as a sign of the covenant of the whole people with God was not necessarily imposed on every single individual. In the dispensation of the New Testament circumcision no longer exists, because it was the sign *par excellence* of the old Law, and a positive commandment of it.

In the book of *Exodus* we read of another covenant concluded between God and His people at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses built an altar and erected twelve stones beside or round about it, in accordance with the number of the tribes of Israel (Ex. xxiv.4). That such an altar could have served as a token is well proved by the story related in *Josue* xxii.10ff., and that the stones could have had that meaning is clear from their very number. Their primary purpose was for worship, but they were also to be perpetual witnesses of what had happened once in the past. A second sign to confirm the covenant is the singular rite with the blood of animals, mentioned only in *Exodus* xxiv.5ff. Half of the blood was for Yahweh and was sprinkled on the altar, half of it on the people, and *between* those two acts (if we

¹ The Israelites greatly scorned the Philistines because they were not circumcised, with the suggestion that uncircumcised meant impure. This is an additional explanation of why circumcision was so important.

may interpret the text strictly in this way) the book of the Law was read. Thus the sprinkling of the blood and the reading of the Law were closely united and formed one sacred ceremony. It has been said that the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the people was done after the pattern of a blood-ceremony, which established kinship between two persons, clans or tribes,¹ and there may be some truth in this statement. Of course real kinship between Yahweh and his people was impossible, but strong ties were to keep both together, or rather to keep the people united with their God, and this unity was symbolised by the ceremony. It established a real bond between God and His people, and though the bond was before everything a moral one, which could be both broken and repaired, the ceremony of the sprinkling of the two parts of the blood was a sacred act which was not without effect of itself. By it Israel was in a certain sense consecrated to God and acquired a special holiness.

Other important signs are the many sacrifices of the old Law. According to the Old Testament sacrifices were offered from the beginning and they are thought by many scholars to have been a feature of every religion.² Certainly its origins are deeply rooted in human nature. But it is not certain that all the ceremonies which are classified as sacrifices are expressions of one and the same fundamental idea; however, we need not examine this here. We wish to confine ourselves to the idea of sacrifice as it is found in *Leviticus* I-VII, chapters whose ultimate formulation is to be regarded as the result of a long development, certainly as far as details are concerned, and perhaps also in some important ideas. That which is offered is always food, either animal or vegetable. This, however, does not necessarily imply that it is always offered precisely as food, or that the final author of *Leviticus* regarded it as such; it is with his intention, rather than with the primitive meaning of such sacrifices that we are concerned here. Clearly it cannot be doubted that the author of this book shared the belief expressed in *Psalms* L.13, where God asks: "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?"³

¹ cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, new edit. 1903, London, p. 59ff.

² This is however denied by so eminent an author as W. Schmidt, s.v.d., *Ethnologische Bemerkungen zu theologischen Opfertheorien*, Wien 1922, p. 21ff.

³ In *Leviticus* 1.9ff. the sacrificial substance is called 'is'eh, which is generally translated as "offering made by fire"; but some link it with the root 'ns, to be friendly. Recently it has been translated by H. Cazelles as "mets consumé" (*Le Lévitique: Bible de Jérusalem*, Paris 1951, p. 13 etc.), though he concedes that the Israelites actually linked the word with 'es, fire. This concession makes his translation doubtful, at least in *Leviticus* I-VII, since in a given context a term is not to be translated according to its original or etymological sense, but according to the meaning attached to it by those who use the word. We have therefore no proof that the material of the sacrifice is called the food of God in *Leviticus* I-VII, and it is certain that it was not thought of in this way.

The priestly author first distinguishes three kinds of sacrifice : the holocaust, the meal offering, and the sacrifice of communion ; then two other kinds are added : the sin offering and the guilt offering. Of the holocaust, the sin offering and the guilt offering it is explicitly stated that they are offered to obtain expiation. The smoke of the sacrifice, even of the meal offering and the sacrifice of communion, is called the soothing or tranquillising perfume.¹ The old versions, Latin, Greek, Syriac and Aramaic, ignore the sense of "soothing" and translate the expression by sweet odour, or, according to Onkelos "that which is favourably received". But the Hebrew word means literally "causing to rest", and therefore "appeasing". Possibly this meaning had been lost by the time the Greek version was made, or it may have been considered too anthropomorphic. Anything may be soothing or placating for two reasons : it averts the anger of God which has been roused, or it prevents it from being roused. In one of these two senses all the sacrifices mentioned in *Leviticus* i-vii are thought by its final author or redactor to be soothing. But if we try to penetrate more deeply into the exact meaning of the different sacrifices, we find it difficult to give adequate explanations. The meaning of a sign may vary according to the time when it is used. We have to keep in mind that such very old signs and symbols as sacrifices may have had an original meaning which was replaced by another later on. Many religious ceremonies, as we know from our own practices, are performed simply because they are traditional and have been handed down from generations long past. Those who perform them do what they have seen done by others as acts of religion, to honour God, to fulfil His will and to implore His favour. For the Israelite, the Law was above all the expression of the will of God ; if the later Jew offered sacrifices, it was first of all because God had ordered him to do so ; if he did it of his own initiative, he had to do it according to the precise rules which had been laid down for him in the Law. But this does not mean that sacrifices had no further meaning. The particular significance of the sin offering and the guilt offering is clearly indicated by their very names, though it surprises us to find that the "sins" for which such sacrifices must be offered, were sometimes unconscious infringements of the Law (cf. *Lev.* v.17). This must not, however, lead to the conclusion that the legislator had no strictly moral concept of sin, a conclusion clearly at variance with many other places in the Old Testament. The idea in *Leviticus* i-vii is rather that the holiness of God is so great that every offence, even an inadvertent one, committed

¹ *re'h nshd'h* : "soothing, tranquilising odour" (BDB), "*parfum d'apaisement*" (Cazelles) ; Zorell hesitates, translating the second of the two words by *placans, pacans, Deo placens*.

against such holiness, ought to be repaired. Violations of the Law which were not considered as violations of the covenant¹ could be repaired by sacrifices, which took away the consequences of ceremonial uncleanness. Thus they were a means of preserving the correct procedure to be observed in the worship of God, and served to emphasise the strict rights which God enjoyed by reason of His sanctity.

The sacrifice of the holocaust is probably much older than the two mentioned above, and consequently its meaning is less clear in the Law. According to *Leviticus* I it seems to have been offered to expiate for sins and to obtain the general favour of God. The sins are not limited to any specific examples, and the holocaust was probably considered the highest ritual act of religion. By it the complete dependence of man on God was recognised. Hence it belongs to the daily service. It was offered to God by Noe after the flood, by kings before a battle, and so on. It is nowhere stated that by virtue of this sacrifice sins disappeared, and the prophets protested against the idea that man could win the favour of God merely by external acts such as sacrifices. So it is not clear precisely what efficacy was attached to the sign. They were external acts by which man could show his submission to God, and they emphasised the need of winning God's favour. The Israelite believed that by offering sacrifice with a pure intention, he had at least ameliorated his relations with God. What was the exact role played by the sacrifice? It seems to have been considered as more than a mere sign, but how much more? The prophets were strongly opposed to the more or less magical conception many Israelites had of the efficacy of sacrifice. But the author of *Leviticus* I-VII was much more interested in the exact ritual of sacrifices, than in the idea which lay behind them; and because the whole Law stressed so much the fulfilment of the will of God, it is reasonable to suppose that the idea of the lawgiver was fundamentally the same as that of the prophets.

In the case of the meal offering the prevalent idea was that of offering a gift to God in His sanctuary. Nobody would dare to appear before a great personage to ask his favour or simply to speak with him, without offering a present. It is understandable, therefore, that gifts were presented to God in the same circumstances. The giving of the first fruits to God is a custom found even among such primitive peoples as the Pygmies, and the purpose is to recognise His dominion.

¹ When an individual had transgressed the covenant he had to be eliminated, usually by death. The Law possessed no system of greater or lesser penalties, such as we find for instance in the Manual of Discipline of the Covenanters of Qumran, or in a modern penal code. Death was practically the only true penalty, and it is not considered as a punishment in the modern sense of the word. This penalty could not be commuted by the imposition of sacrifices in its place. cf. J. van der Ploeg, "Studies in Hebrew Law", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 1951, pp. 166-9.

The Israelite peasant, who had to give a good part of his harvest to the landlord, was not surprised that he had to give the first fruits to God; they belonged to God, and it was by His permission that man could make use of them. The sacrifice of communion was followed by a sacred meal in which man ate, as it were, with his God. To eat and drink together is a sign of peace; if anyone enters the tent of a Bedouin and eats the slightest morsel of food with him, or drinks only a cup of coffee, he knows that he will suffer no harm, and the lord of the tent is bound to protect his guest against every enemy. Hence the sin mentioned in psalm *XLI.10*, and later committed by Judas, could hardly be more heinous. The sacrifice of communion then, combined with the sacred meal in the House of God, was a token of intimate friendship. It presumed that the participants were fulfilling the will of God, and behaving in their daily lives as His friends. It was because the contrary was all too frequent in practice, that the prophets hated such sacrificial ceremonies, for when sinners participated in them, they were lying mockeries. The sacrifice of communion was moreover offered privately in fulfilment of a vow (cf. Ps. *XXII.23-27*). When God had granted what had been asked and thus shown himself the good friend of the one who had taken the vow, it was natural that the latter should eat and drink with God.

It is therefore clear that some kinds of sacrifices had a special significance because of their resemblance to the customs of everyday life. But regarding the holocaust and sin offerings it is difficult to say much more than that the later Israelites and Jews knew them to be in accordance with the will of God.¹ Animals for sacrifices, except those for the sacrifices of the poor, were costly, and this also made clear that the favour of an offended God was not easily regained; to sin against God was indeed a serious crime. It is not easy to say how far the sacrificial animal was thought to be offered in place of the person who presented it. That the idea of vicarious suffering was not unknown is clear from *Isaias LIII*, but we have already seen that generally speaking, true violations of the covenant could not be repaired by sacrifices.

Finally something must be said about two other very important rites—purification with water and anointing with oil. The symbolic meaning of the first seems clear; as water washes away the impurities of the body, so it may also take away ritual uncleanness. But what is such uncleanness? From later rabbinic discussions we may conclude that it was something quasi material which could be contracted by the slightest contact with impure things. Its opposite was holiness, and

¹ cf O. Schmitz, *Die Opferanschauungen des späteren Judentums*, Tübingen 1910, p. 119.

of this also, *mutatis mutandis*, the same may be said. Thus clothes which were worn by the priests in the sanctuary were holy, because they had been in contact with the holy objects of the holy place. Though it was dangerous to come into close contact with holy things, it was not dangerous to become unclean. The idea of uncleanness was originally a merely ritual one, and had in itself nothing to do with morality, though it could be a consequence of immoral deeds. In later times ritual and moral uncleanness were confused and even identified, as is not surprising, since most people find it easier to identify things which are similar rather than to distinguish between them. Various things, considered disgusting to God, were unclean; but within this category were included also the exercise of very vital functions, such as of sex and childbirth. It cannot be doubted that very primitive ideas and taboos are at the root of all this, but it is very hard to say how far these actually influenced the idea of uncleanness in later times.

Uncleanness made a person ritually unfit to take part in the cult. Only holy persons, in the widest sense of the word, could approach God, because He Himself is holy. Uncleanness could be removed from a person or thing in various ways, and most commonly by a complete or partial bath. As in the case of sacrifices, we do not know precisely how the water removed the uncleanness. In later times the legislation on ritual purity and the means whereby uncleanness was to be removed, were considered simply as the expression of the will of God. As God had created all things, He had also instituted the means of purification. The Law taught the Israelites that God is so great that even certain material conditions are required, in order to approach Him in worship. Moral cleanness was of course required first. But in dealing with the great ones of the earth, the observance of certain external ceremonies is necessary; to teach the Israelites that God is greater than the most exalted on earth, the Law required them to be clean, even in the ritual sense of the word. If rightly understood, this requirement also taught them purity of heart. A particular ceremony of purification was that which was done with a kind of holy water (Num. xix), made for special purposes and in a special way. Because of the way in which it was prepared, it was certainly thought to be more powerful than ordinary or even "living" water, though nothing of this is stated in the Law. The command to use it was again an expression of the will of God; the origin of the custom is probably quite primitive.

A custom of which the primitive origin has not yet been explained is that of anointing with oil. Oil was poured out on holy stones or even rubbed into them; kings, prophets and priests were anointed

with it, and also holy objects (Ex. xxx.26ff.). It may be that in early times oil was used for reasons not altogether unlike those for which blood was used in different circumstances. The blood was thought to be the seat of life, or even life itself (Deut. xii.23), in the vague way the ancient Israelites used to speak. Similarly the fat of an animal seems to have been considered as a vital part of it, and the seat of life. The oil of the olive may have been considered in a similar way, as the spirit of life, and therefore the unction may have been regarded as a means of giving life or more life to the person anointed. Later on this idea was lost; the holy oil of *Exodus xxx.22-5* was prepared in a special way, and it was forbidden for lay-people to use the holy recipe, on no less a penalty than death, since it was sacrilege (Ex. xxx.23).

Anointing with sacred oil conferred holiness, in the sense defined above. It brought the person into closer contact with the divine, because in Israel Yahweh alone was the Holy One, and the source of all holiness. Several times prophets who had the spirit of God anointed a man as king. Samuel took oil and poured it over David, and from that day "the spirit of Yahweh rested on David" (1 Sam. xvi.13). From this it might be inferred that the pouring of oil on the head of the elect was a sign of the giving of the spirit, and produced this effect in some mysterious way. But in the history of Saul we read that he was first anointed, and only afterwards, though probably the same day, did the spirit of Yahweh come over him (1 Sam. x.6). The anointing of Saul by Samuel had been accompanied by powerful prophetic words which were to produce what they expressed. The unction of Jehu was also accomplished by a prophet, and accompanied by a word of Yahweh: "Thus says Yahweh: I have anointed thee king over Israel" (2 Kgs. ix.3). In *Isaias lxi.1* a prophet says: "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me"; this recalls 1 *Kings xix.16* where we read that Elias received the command to anoint Eliseus. Thus we see that a primitive custom, the first scope of which may have been to strengthen and confer a new vitality, is later used as a symbol which indicated the transfer of the mysterious quality of ritual holiness, or even of the spirit. In Israel the spirit of God was not transferred by oil and unction, though a certain connection remains; it is God who gives the spirit or the spirit itself which comes upon a person. Solemn and powerful words had to accompany the anointing.

These examples taken from the daily life of the Israelites show abundantly the paramount significance of signs and symbols in their religious practice. It is also clear that in the true religion of Yahweh those signs and symbols lost more and more of their original, primitive

and quasi-magical significance, to a point where they became simply expressions of the will of God. But even as such they were thought to have, by the will of God, some mysterious power, the character of which cannot be determined. Being signs and symbols of the old dispensation, they were also shades of things to come. The new dispensation which has come through our Lord Jesus Christ is considered by the Christian as a continuation, an amplification and a fulfilment of the old one. In this supernatural order of things it is only to be expected that various signs which guided the faithful in the time of the old covenant should have been taken over with a more perfect meaning in the new. But these new meanings are not wholly new; they are the "fulfilment" of the old and in harmony with them. The people of God has become the Church, gathered from all nations; and its holy signs are the Sacraments.

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BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The history of Christian Baptism takes its origins from the mission of John the Baptist. In our day, when that saint has long since ceased to hold the prominent place in Christian popular devotion which he occupied until the close of the Middle Ages, we are perhaps in danger of underestimating his significance in the story of Christianity, and specifically, the part he played in pointing out the meaning of the future sacrament of Baptism. It is sad to recall that the age-old, universal Christian cultus enjoyed by John appears to have terminated, at the time of the Reformation, in what might be called an act of misguided veneration. Zwingli, Calvin and, eventually, Luther, declared that Johannine baptism had the same efficacy as the Christian sacrament, an erroneous view which the Council of Trent defined as heretical.

Yet in any discussion concerning Baptism in the New Testament, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the place of special honour which each of the canonical Gospels reserves for the Baptist. St Mark considers John's work as "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God" (Mk. 1.1). In order to grasp the meaning of John's role in the Christian revelation, it is helpful to keep in mind the various characterisations of him suggested by the evangelists. Broadly speaking, we may say that there are two distinct presentations of him in the New Testament. In the Synoptic Gospels he appears as *Elias redivivus*, as a prophet who announces the imminent coming

of the Christ. An integral part of this conception, as we shall see, is the representation of John as the prophet of Christian Baptism. In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, it is as a witness, testifying to the identity of the Christ, that John plays his part in the drama of salvation (cf. the prologue, Jn. 1.6-8, 15). A brief study of each of these characterisations of John the Baptist will reveal important aspects of Christian Baptism.

John makes his appearance in the first three Gospels as a prophet. Matthew, Mark and Luke each depict John's principal function as the preaching or "heralding" of the Kingdom. John's is the "voice crying in the desert" (Is. XL.3) proclaiming "the Word of God" which "came to him", as it had come to the Old Testament prophets (Lk. III.2). John appears in the garb which had characterised Elias the prophet (II Kgs. 1.8; Mt. III.4). Indeed Gabriel had announced to Zachary before John's conception that the child would be "endowed with the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk. 1.17). Christ Himself declared to His disciples after John's death that in his person Elias had returned and had "restored all things" (Mt. XVII.11). This "restoration", the work of the returning Elias, which is a recurrent theme in later Old Testament tradition (Mal. III.1-5, 22-3; Eccclus. XLVIII.1-11), was to become an article of faith in post-biblical Judaism.

John effected this "restoration of all things" by his invitation to *metanoia*, a change of heart or repentance on Israel's part which, by re-establishing good relations with Yahweh, was the necessary preparation for the coming of His Christ. The symbol of this restoration was Johannine baptism, a lustration performed in the river Jordan. John himself called it a baptism "with water, aimed at a change of heart" (Mt. III.11). The second evangelist describes it as "a baptism in token of a change of heart, which looked to the forgiveness of sins" (Mk. 1.4). Long after John's death, Paul was to explain to a little group of the Baptist's disciples whom he had discovered at Ephesus how "John practised a baptism of repentance, telling the people they should make an act of faith in him who was to come after him . . ." (Acts XIX.4). The evangelists also tell us that the reception of Johannine baptism was accompanied by a confession of sins (Mt. III.6; Mk. 1.5). Thus the New Testament reveals John's baptism as a sign of a fundamental change of heart, involving sincere repentance of sin and renewed faith in the proximate advent of the Christ. Moreover, it was by means of this baptism that John effected the "restoration of all things", and was accordingly revealed as a prophet, the second Elias.

John is, in addition, presented by the Synoptics as the prophet of Christian Baptism. "I am baptising you with water in token of repentance", John tells the crowds who gathered to hear him. "He

who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am indeed unworthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with a Holy Spirit and fire" (Mt. III.11). The value of this text lies in its description of the Baptism Christ was to institute as essentially eschatological—that is, as pertaining to the "last times", the Messianic age. The Old Testament prophets had characterised the era ushered in by the Christ as an age when Yahweh would pour out his Spirit in abundance upon mankind (Joel III.5ff.). They also designated it as the terrible "Day of Yahweh" when He should pass judgment upon all humanity—a judgment whose searching, relentless character they symbolised by fire (Amos VII.4; Is. XXX.27-30; Mal. III.2). Faithful to this prophetic tradition, John associated these world-shaking events with the coming of the Christ. His originality consists however in connecting them with what was later to be known as Christian Baptism. Subsequent history was to teach the disciples of Christ to distinguish different moments in this Messianic period, which John, like his predecessors, had depicted, with prophetic foreshortening, as contemporaneous. During the period subsequent to Christ's resurrection, the apostles learned that there was to be a second coming of Jesus Christ, while the interval between, inaugurated by the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Ghost, was designated as the period during which the Church should practise this Baptism "with a Holy Spirit and fire".

Yet the eschatological note picked out by the Baptist's prophecy of Christian Baptism remains important for the New Testament conception of this sacrament. It deserves to be recalled here, particularly as the modern Christian, unlike his brethren of the apostolic age, has a tendency to overlook the relation which the sacramental system bears to Christ's *parousia* or second coming. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, describes the Eucharistic sacrifice in terms of the second coming. "As often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" (I Cor. XI.26). In Paul's view, the Eucharistic coming of the risen Christ is a reminder of, and a preparation for, his coming at the end of time. On Pentecost Peter had made it clear to his audience that the "baptism with the Spirit" received by the apostolic assembly and accompanied by the charismatic gifts of ecstatic prayer and prophecy, had inaugurated "the Day of Yahweh" and was, in consequence, a sign of the imminence of the eschatological judgment (Acts II.16-17; Joel III.1ff.). The apostolic experience during the first years of the Church's growth will, as we shall see, clarify this eschatological character of Baptism. For the moment, it is sufficient to realise that in the New Testament the Christian sacraments appear as signs of "the end".

In addition to this prophetic description of Christian Baptism,

another prophetic function of the Baptist's was pointed out in the apostolic preaching: the Messianic anointing of Jesus by his baptism in the Jordan (Acts iv.27; x.38; cf. Lk. iv.18; Heb. i.9). This event occupies a place of first-rate importance in the Synoptic tradition. As described in the first three Gospels, the scene culminates in a theophany (sensible manifestation of the divine presence), in which "the Holy Ghost descended in bodily form like a dove" (Lk. iii.22a, a text which contains the most explicit reference to the Third Person of the Trinity), while Christ heard the voice of his Father declaring the Messianic royalty of His Son (Mt. iii.17; Mk. i.11; Lk. iii.22b). In this inaugural vision of Jesus' public life, as the Fathers of the Church perceived, all the elements which are to constitute the future sacrament of Baptism stand revealed: the washing with water, the Spirit, the reference to the Triune Godhead. In order to obtain a deeper insight into the meaning of the Messianic anointing of Jesus and of John's part in it, however, we must turn to the Fourth Gospel.

The fourth evangelist assigns the Baptist's message to the category of *testimony*. "I have come baptising with water in order that he might be made known in Israel" (Jn. i.31). This manifestation of the Christ by John is represented as the result of the theophany which occurred at Jesus' baptism. "He who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descend and rest, is he who baptises with a Holy Spirit'. And I have seen, and I have continued to testify that he is the Son of God" (Jn. i.33-4). As these words indicate, John's testimony was primarily concerned with the Person of Jesus Christ, and only secondarily with the Baptism which he would institute. The fact that they contain only an implicit reference to Jesus' baptism by John, an incident which is central in the Synoptic tradition, indicates the view which the Fourth Gospel takes of John's function. Earlier in this same chapter the Baptist is represented as contrasting his baptism, not, as in the Synoptics, with that of Christ, but with the presence of Christ himself (Jn. i.26-7).

By focusing attention upon Christ rather than upon Christian Baptism in these opening scenes of his Gospel, St John the evangelist presents a facet of that sacrament which did not appear in the Synoptic accounts: the relation of Baptism to Christ's death. "Behold the Lamb of God! He who is taking away the world's sin" (Jn. i.29). John attests that Jesus is at once the new Paschal Lamb, anti-type of that lamb which was the perennial symbol of Israel's redemption out of Egypt, as well as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, compared with a lamb in undergoing that redemptive death in which "He bore the sins of many" (Is. liii.12). By thus adding a new dimension to the Baptist's message, the last of the Gospels provides a deeper insight

into the "Baptism with the Spirit" which Christ is come to impart. Its efficacy depends upon the fact that it is he who will, by his redemptive death, liberate the world from sin.

In the Synoptic narrative of Jesus' public life there is little, at first sight, that seems to throw any light upon the sacrament of Baptism. Twice, it is true, Christ refers to his coming death as a "baptism". When the sons of Zebedee demand the places of honour in his "glory", Jesus asks: "Can you drink the cup I shall drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I shall be baptised?" (Mk. x.38). In the context (cf. Mk. x.45) it is clear that he means his death. In *Luke* xii.50 there is a similar reference. "I have a baptism with which I am to be baptised. What anguish do I experience until it be consummated!" This "baptism" is a prelude to the accomplishment of his mission, "to cast fire upon the earth" (Lk. x.49). That "fire" is the judgment, as the verses following indicate (Lk. x.51-3). Luke is moreover probably thinking of the Pentecostal fire, to which he will refer in his second volume (Acts 1.5). These sayings of Jesus both insist upon an essential feature of Christian Baptism, its orientation to Jesus' redemptive death, as well as to the judgment already mentioned by John the Baptist.

While the Synoptic tradition has retained little in its record of Christ's teaching during the public ministry which may be considered as bearing directly upon the later apostolic baptismal theology, it has preserved a conception of the miracles performed during Jesus' mortal life which the Fourth Gospel will develop into a most remarkable sacramental theology. On the Synoptic view, Jesus' miracles of healing are, not less than the exorcisms he performed, an initial assault upon Satan's dominion over men. As a prologue to his narrative of the Galilean ministry, Luke has prefixed the *récit* of Jesus' visit to Nazareth, in which we find recorded the words he read on that occasion from the scroll of *Isaias*, and which he declared fulfilled in himself. His mission is "to announce release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed at liberty" (Is. lxi.1-2; Lk. iv.16ff.). Matthew's introduction to the public life, which contains a citation of *Isaias* viii.23; ix.1, suggests the same campaign against evil in terms of light and darkness (Mt. iv.14ff.). His account of the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniacs presents that miracle as an anticipation of the definitive blow which, by his death, Christ will strike at Satan's kingdom. "Are you come here to torture us before the time appointed by God?" (Mt. viii.29). The Greek word, here translated as "the time appointed by God", is, in the New Testament, a quasi-technical term for Jesus' passion and death. Perhaps the clearest statement of this miracle-theology by Matthew is found in

his description of Christ's mission of the Twelve. "And calling his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, so as to cast them out and heal all manner of disease and sickness" (Mt. x.1). In Luke's account of the triumphant return of the seventy-two to announce to Jesus the miracles they had performed, even over the demons, Jesus remarks: "I was watching Satan falling from heaven like flashes of lightning" (Lk. x.18). The miracles performed by Christ as well as those performed in his name are, then, a pledge of his ultimate victory over Satan. In other words, the miracles of the public life are an initial step in the founding of the Kingdom upon earth.

In the Fourth Gospel we see this view of Jesus' miracles developed into a theology of the Christian sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Baptism. Just as the Old Testament prophets applied the great events of Israel's past (the exodus out of Egypt, the creation of the world) to contemporary or future happenings in order to explain their religious signification, so too John employs Jesus' miracles to propound the doctrine of the sacramental system. Just as these miracles inaugurated the Kingdom in this world and, as such, look forward to Jesus' salvific death and resurrection (the definitive coming of the Kingdom), so the sacramental practice of the apostolic Church, the chief means for the spread of that Kingdom, looks backwards to the central act of man's redemption. Space permits the mention here of only one example of John's baptismal theology, the cure of the blind man at the pool of Siloe (Jn. ix.1ff.).¹ John relates how Jesus "anoints" the blind eyes with mud as he pronounces the words, "I am the light of the world" (Jn. ix.5), and then sends the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloe. This place-name, which actually means "conduit", is interpreted by the evangelist as "the One sent", that is, the Christ (Jn. ix.7). By such a symbolic interpretation John informs his readers that he has perceived, in this command to wash in a pool which bears Christ's name, an action which prophetically signifies Baptism. The miracle points to those waters which bear Christ's name because in them Christ's sacramental action of regeneration is operative. In such a context Jesus' reference to himself as "the light of the world" becomes clear, Baptism being regarded by the apostolic Church as an illumination (Eph. v.14; Heb. vi.4; x.32). Christ's concluding remarks in this episode again draw attention to its baptismal signification. "I am come into this world [to effect] a discrimination: that the sightless may obtain the gift of sight and that those who see

¹ The interpretation followed here is that of Père M.-J. Lagrange, O.P., in his commentary on St John's Gospel. More recently, Oscar Cullmann has developed this sacramental theme of the Fourth Gospel in a fascinating monograph, *Les sacrements dans l'évangile johannique*, Paris 1951.

may become blind" (Jn. ix.39). The Church has always taught that faith is required in him who would receive the baptismal illumination.

The Fourth Gospel also records two discourses of Jesus which contain his baptismal teaching. In the first of these, the conversation with Nicodemus, Baptism is described by a characteristically Johannine *double entendre* as a birth "anew" or "from above". The rest of the dialogue makes it very clear that what is meant is a new, supernatural birth. It is the work of "the Spirit" (Jn. iii.8); its author is "the Son of man who descended from heaven" (Jn. iii.13); it effects "eternal life", to be conferred by Christ once he is "exalted" upon the cross and, ultimately, at the right hand of the Father. This last point is illustrated by the brazen serpent which Moses "exalted" in the desert (Jn. viii.14) and which, in late Old Testament theological thought, had been regarded as a "symbol of salvation" (Wisd. xvi.6). The most important item in this instruction of Christ's is however the description of the new birth as effected "by water and the Spirit" (Jn. iii.5). This is the clearest statement in the New Testament of the role played by these two essential elements in Christian Baptism. Another conversation, that between Jesus and the Samaritan woman near the well, contains important Baptismal doctrine. The distinction Jesus makes on this occasion between well-water and "living water" (water flowing in a brook or from a spring) would appear to be the source of the Church's insistence from earliest times upon the use of flowing water in the administration of Baptism (cf. *Didache* vii, 1). In John's narrative, "living water" is a symbol for a mysterious, supernatural reality. "Any man who drinks this water" (that drawn from Jacob's well) "will be thirsty again. Whoever drinks the water I shall give him, will never again experience thirst. For the water I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water that leaps up unto eternal life" (Jn. iv.13-14). Among the Fathers of the Church, Justin and Irenaeus understand these words of Baptism. Moreover, the evangelist himself explains this "fountain" or "rivulets" of "living water" as "the Spirit whom those who came to believe in him were destined to receive" (Jn. vii.38-9). This "living water" which symbolises the Spirit is the sacrament of Baptism. Christ's promise that this divinely given "drink" will slake thirst for ever is a reference to a quality of Baptism which distinguishes it from the Eucharist, the impossibility of its being repeated.

The scene which closes Jesus' mortal life in the Fourth Gospel, the piercing of his sacred side, is of the greatest significance for John, as his insistence of his own veracity as an eye-witness shows (Jn. xix.35). Moreover John makes use of this same episode in his description of "Jesus Christ the Son of God" in his first epistle (1 Jn. v.6-8). "He

who is come by water and by blood, Jesus Christ; not with water only but with water and with blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. There are accordingly three who bear witness, the Spirit, the water, the blood; and these three are in agreement". John clearly regards the water and the blood which issued from Christ's side as miraculous, and therefore as most meaningful, like the other "signs" recounted in his Gospel. John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, with other Fathers of the Church, regard the water as a symbol of Baptism, while the blood signifies the Eucharist. St Augustine asserts that the birth of the Church, the new Eve, occurred on the cross because of this emission of blood and water "in which we perceive the sacraments by which the Church is built up".

St Matthew's Gospel reaches its conclusion and its climax in the mandate of the risen Christ to his apostles. "Universal power in heaven and upon earth has been granted to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all peoples, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Mt. xxviii.18-19). In virtue of his investiture with supreme and universal domination, conferred by God the Father in consequence of his death and resurrection, Christ now declares himself author of the Church and of the sacrament of Baptism. The precision and the liturgical character of the formula, "in the Name . . .", have led modern Catholic scholars to perceive in these words a reflection of the liturgical practice already in general use throughout the apostolic Church by the time our canonical Greek version of this Gospel came to be written. Whether or not this formulation of Trinitarian faith had supplanted an earlier custom of baptising "in the Name of Jesus" is a question we shall discuss later.

It is remarkable that nowhere in the New Testament are the apostles said to have received Christian Baptism, according to the rite which, from the day of Pentecost itself, they administered to the first converts to Christianity. The silence of the sacred text upon this point would not, of course, constitute an argument by itself, were it not for other evidence provided by *Acts*. St Luke makes it clear that the apostolic group in the upper room was baptised with the Holy Ghost in the fires of Pentecost. He first carefully records Christ's promise of this "baptism". "Whereas John baptised with water, you will be baptised with a Holy Spirit not many days hence" (*Acts* 1.5; cf. also *Lk.* xxiv.49). Then in his description of Pentecost itself he shows how this prediction was fulfilled by the appearance of "tongues like fire, which, being divided, rested upon each of them. And they were all filled with a Holy Spirit" (*Acts* 11.3-4). What is

of greatest significance, however, in Luke's account, is the presentation of the unique character of this "baptism". By it the "new Israel" was created out of the little band of disciples in the upper room. That the apostolic group at once perceived the significance of what had happened to them is evident from Peter's Pentecostal discourse in which he cites a section from Joel describing the wonders of "the last days" where mention is made of the surviving remnant of Israel (Joel III.5). This was that holy nucleus which Isaiah had foretold would, in the Messianic age, include "everyone enrolled amongst those destined for life in Jerusalem" (Is. IV.2-3 ; cf. Acts II.47).

This consciousness of the singular nature of their Pentecostal experience led the newly created community to practise a completely new rite in admitting to their ranks those who wished to join them : baptism with water, and the imposition of hands by which the Holy Spirit was visibly imparted. The "baptism with the Spirit" which they themselves had received in fulfilment of Christ's promise and which had constituted them the Messianic community was, of its very nature, impossible of repetition. Yet they were aware, as *Acts* shows, that by Christian Baptism they could bring new members into the Church and so impart to them a share in that same Spirit who had descended upon themselves in a special manner. Perhaps the episode of Cornelius's conversion is the one which best illustrates the apostolic awareness of the distinction which obtained between their Pentecostal "baptism" and sacramental Baptism. Before this pagan and his household were baptised they received the Holy Ghost (Acts X.44-6). Peter's description of the extraordinary event, in his speech to the Jerusalem congregation, is to be noted. "The Holy Spirit fell upon them exactly as upon us in the beginning" (Acts XI.15). Yet Peter's subsequent decision, caused by this very manifestation of the Spirit, puts a somewhat different construction upon his statement. "He ordered them to be baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ" (Acts X.48). Despite his insistence upon the similarity of Cornelius's experience to that of the community on Pentecost, Peter recognised an essential difference. He knew that the first descent of the Spirit had been a baptism which transformed the disciples into the "new Israel". In the case of Cornelius and his household, Peter saw that the coming of the Holy Ghost was proof of God's will that they should be aggregated to the apostolic community by Christian Baptism.

One further point concerning the primitive community's conception of Christian Baptism deserves to be mentioned here. It would appear, on the evidence of the very ancient sources which Luke employed in writing the first part of *Acts*, that in the first years the gift of the Holy Spirit was looked upon as an effect of the imposition of hands,

the rite which normally accompanied Baptism, rather than as the direct result of Baptism itself. The well-known story of Philip's evangelisation of Samaria seems to exemplify such a viewpoint (Acts viii.5-17). Thus it would appear that while admission into the Messianic community was regarded as the primary effect of Baptism, the explicit reference to the Spirit was reserved for the imposition of hands. At the same time, it must be remembered that "remission of sins" was also regarded as an effect of Baptism (Acts ii.38), and it is quite clear that from the beginning the Church distinguished this sacrament from the purely symbolical nature of Johannine baptism. Further reflection upon Christian Baptism moved the Church to make explicit what perhaps had only been implied in her earlier view, viz. that by Baptism the Holy Spirit was communicated to the Christian. It may well be that such a theological development was largely due to the reflection of St John the evangelist, who recognised in the waters of Baptism a symbol of the presence of the Spirit. At any rate, by the time the Fourth Gospel was written, apostolic Christianity had consciously adverted to the operation of the Holy Ghost in Baptism itself and had formulated a definition of the sacrament as a rebirth of "water and the Spirit" (Jn. iii.5).

We may now ask a question which we mentioned earlier and which has long been a subject of discussion amongst students of the New Testament: what is meant by "Baptism in the Name of Jesus"? On Pentecost Peter remarks to those who found faith in his preaching: "Repent, and let each of you have himself baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii.37-8). The Samaritans converted by Philip were "baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts viii.10), as were also the Ephesian followers of John the Baptist whom Paul converted to Christianity (Acts xix.4-6). It is perhaps Paul's account of his own baptism by Ananias in Damascus which gives the best insight into the meaning of this expression (Acts xxii.16). Ananias is represented as saying to the blinded Saul: "Arise, be baptised, and be washed from your sins by invoking his Name". From this it is evident that the invocation of "his Name" is made, not by the minister of the sacrament, but by the candidate for Baptism himself. The supreme importance which the apostolic Church attached to this baptismal profession of faith resulted in the designation of Baptism as "Baptism in the Name of Jesus". Paul has preserved one version of this *credo* for us in his letter to the Romans. "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. x.9). A few verses further on, the apostle provides what appears to have been the

Scriptural basis for this element in the baptismal liturgy (Rom. x.13). It is the same text of Joel mentioned in Peter's Pentecostal sermon: "Whoever invokes the Name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel iii.5).

What is the meaning of such a formula, "Jesus is Lord"? The answer to this question is provided by *Philippians* ii.9, where Jesus' exaltation is described as the conferring upon him by God the Father, of the divine Name "Lord". This characteristically Semitic way of stating that Jesus' divinity was revealed to the first disciples by his resurrection and elevation to the right hand of God indicates that the baptismal invocation of "Jesus' Name" (i.e. "Lord") was a profession of faith in the fact that he is divine. It is to be observed that such a credal formula implied, moreover, the Trinitarian faith of the primitive Church. For it was to the revelation of Jesus' glorification that the apostolic community owed its belief in the Trinity. Through her contemplation of the risen Lord, the Church was led to acknowledge the Father as source of Jesus' glory and to confess the Holy Spirit, principle of all holiness, as the gift of her ascended Master. Thus the invocation of "the Name of the Lord Jesus" was a memorial of the newly found Christian faith in the Triune Godhead.

It was this baptismal confession which gave meaning to the reception of Baptism as the means of entering into union with the risen Christ, and consequently (although this implication seems to have dawned only gradually upon the early community) with the Spirit and with the Father. We catch glimpses of this comprehension of the nature of Baptism in the Pauline epistles. To the Corinthian church whose unity was being compromised by the appearance of a partisan spirit ("I am Paul's. I am Apollos's. I am Cephas's", 1 Cor. i.12), St Paul remarks: "Surely Paul was not crucified for you? Surely you were not baptised in the name of Paul? I am grateful that I have baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest any man say you have been baptised in my name" (1 Cor. i.13-15). In Paul's view, the unity of the Church derives from the personal union with Christ entered into by each Christian at his baptism. In urging the Ephesians to preserve the "unity of the Spirit", Paul explicitly refers this union to each of the Persons of the Trinity. [There is but] "one Body and one Spirit, just as you have been called by one hope in your vocation. [There is but] one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all . . ." (Eph. v.3-5). Baptism, then, makes the Christian one with the glorified Lord, Jesus Christ, since he is united to him by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and through this union with Son and Spirit, one with the Father. This doctrine implies a deep theological development which the baptismal teaching of the Jerusalem church underwent at the hands of St Paul, a development we shall presently investigate.

A word must be said concerning the eschatological aspect of the apostolic community's understanding of Baptism, that character of the sacrament to which the Baptist had referred in prophetic terminology by calling it a "Baptism with the Spirit and fire". According to the Old Testament scheme, history was to find its consummation both theologically and historically in the coming of the Messias. He would usher in the final judgment of God upon humanity, since in his person the good must win a definitive triumph over evil. The New Testament revelation which crowned the Messianic expectations of Judaism modified this theology of history profoundly. Jesus' ascension into heaven after his death and resurrection taught the apostles that there was to be a second coming, in glory, of the risen Lord. As to the period intermediary between Jesus Christ's first and second coming, it was the descent of the Holy Spirit that revealed its significance. This intercalary era was indeed part of the "Messianic times". It was, however, specifically a time of preparation for the final *parousia*. The preparation consisted chiefly in the building up of God's Kingdom upon earth, the Church, by means of the Christian sacraments. Baptism had its place in such a scheme of things as a rite of initiation into the Kingdom which washed away men's sins and imparted the divine gift promised during the "last times", the Holy Spirit. As John the Baptist had predicted, it was a "Baptism with the Spirit". It was also a "Baptism with fire", symbol of Yahweh's final judgment at the end of time, because by destroying sin it anticipated that judgment and assured men of salvation. This effect is described by *Acts* with the remark, "the Lord added to the community those who were numbered amongst the saved" (*Acts* 11.47).

We have already seen that the orientation of Baptism to Christ's redemptive death is traceable to the public teaching of Jesus himself. The reference of Baptism to his resurrection, as we also saw, was recognised by the apostolic Church who called it "Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus" and who cherished the tradition of her risen Master's mandate to "make disciples of all nations by baptising them". It was left to St Paul, however, as one of Christianity's first and greatest theologians, to work out the doctrinal implications contained in the deposit of the Church's faith and to create what we may call the first baptismal theology. Two passages in his epistles epitomise his view of Baptism. "All of you who have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (*Gal.* 3.27). In the primitive preaching, Baptism was indicated as the ritual initiation into the "new Israel", the community of the risen Christ. In writing to the Galatians, Paul expresses his profound intuition of this sacrament as a being baptised "into Christ". In his eyes it is an act of incorporation into the Body of the risen Lord,

by which the Christian becomes identified with him as one of his members. Or, as he states to the Corinthians, the baptised becomes "one Spirit" with the risen Lord (1 Cor. vi.17). "For indeed by one Spirit we have—all of us—been baptised into one Body" (1 Cor. xii.13). Such is the dynamic realism of the Pauline conception of "the Body of Christ", Paul's theological transposition of the notion of "the Kingdom of God" in its terrestrial phase. Accordingly, in the text we have cited from *Galatians*, the phrase "to put on Christ" signifies to become a member of the Body of Christ, to become one with Christ. And this identification, as Paul states, is accomplished by Baptism.

Just how this union of the Christian with the glorified Lord is effected through Baptism, is explained by the second text we wish to recall, the only other place in the Pauline letters containing the expression "to be baptised into Christ". "You are surely aware that we, who were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. We were then buried together with him by this Baptism into his death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we may live by a new kind of life. For if we have grown together with [him] into the likeness of his death, so also shall we grow with [him] into the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. vi.3-5). Baptism unites the Christian with Christ by uniting him with the two acts through which Christ accomplished our redemption, his death and resurrection. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul had sketched this same baptismal theology in terms of Israel's redemption from Egypt. Because they shared the experiences which, under the leadership of Moses, had liberated them from Egyptian bondage (the guidance and protection of the cloud, the crossing of the Red Sea), God's people had been in effect "baptised into Moses" (1 Cor. x.1-2). Similarly in the text we are considering, Paul teaches that the double act of the Father's by which Christ "was handed over for our sins and raised for our justification" (Rom. iv.25) reaches out, in Baptism, to include the neophyte, and thus through this baptismal experience of the act of man's redemption the catechumen is "baptised into Christ", united with his glorified Saviour.

With this magnificent conception we reach the climax of New Testament baptismal theology. The eschatological note first sounded by the message of the Baptist in an endeavour to foretell the nature of Christian Baptism, was developed by the apostolic teaching, which regarded it as the act of initiation into the Messianic community of the elect. Finally, it appears fully orchestrated by St Paul's genius as an integral part of his theme of "the Body of Christ". The other New Testament writings concerning Baptism merely provide varia-

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AND THE RESURRECTION

tions on this Pauline theme, describing it as a "rebirth", an "illumination", a "sealing" with the Spirit, a "washing white in the Blood of the Lamb".

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THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AND THE RESURRECTION¹

At first sight it might appear that the fifty-six verses which St John devotes to the Resurrection are not very much. The experience had been so new and overwhelming. Indeed "newness" is the quality of that "Day" which began at the Resurrection and will last through all eternity.

As we read, we find that the Resurrection has caught up the former facts and loves and transformed them. Jesus, triumphant, recalls his Passion by showing his hands and feet and side. The tender gladness of the Apostles at seeing their Lord again is followed by the promised giving of the Spirit and the passing on of Christ's redemptive mission with the power to forgive sins (xx.20-3). The crucified man is recognised for what he is: "My Lord and my God". Jesus is the same tender Master who cooks breakfast for his hungry disciples and manifests himself to fishermen by a miraculous catch of fish, as he had done before (xxi.6-9; Lk. v.1-10). As then it was Peter who was told that he would catch men, and Peter's boat from which they were fishing, so now it is Peter who draws the net to land. And his triple denial is transformed by a triple declaration of humble love. In answer to that declaration, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, commits to Peter the feeding of his own flock for which he laid down his life, a flock which will include others who are not of the Jews (x.11-16; xxi.15-17). Here, then, is John's own account of Christ's foundation of his Church, and it completes what we already know.

John is a master of characterisation. Let us study the effect of the Resurrection by taking three of his characters and seeing how they are transformed. We have just spoken of Peter. There is the same affectionate impetuosity which sends him running to the tomb (apparently rather out of breath, for the younger man outruns him) and makes him blurt out the question concerning the Beloved Disciple: "Lord, what about him?" There is a certain incompre-

¹ [This article has unfortunately been considerably reduced owing to lack of space. —ED.]

hension which needs correcting, as when he does not recognise the meaning of what he sees in the tomb, and is grieved at the triple question about his love. But he is no longer the boastful Simon who declared that he would never deny Jesus even if all the others did. He will not say now that he loves him more than the rest do. Yet Jesus knows his love, for he commits his flock to him, and to feed that flock he must love them. And he is ready now to be told by what a death he will glorify God (XXI.18, 19 ; cf. I Pet. IV.16).

St John begins his narrative of the Resurrection with Mary's coming to the tomb. As usual he presupposes the Synoptic accounts which mention the other women. Mary must have gone straight to the tomb, probably leaving the others to buy the spices, for she arrived "when it was still dark", whereas the others came "when the sun had now risen". She saw that the stone had been taken away. It would seem that she just waited until the arrival of the others, and then ran, one idea in her mind. "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him". We may note in passing that Peter's leadership is taken for granted in spite of his denial of his Lord. After he and John have visited the tomb they go back home. Not so the woman. "But Mary had stood near the tomb without, weeping. And while she went on weeping, she stooped down into the tomb, and she sees two angels in white garments, sitting one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain". But in her preoccupation and her tears they make no impression, and to their kindly question, "Woman, why are you weeping?" she merely reiterates her trouble: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him". Having made sure for herself that the tomb is empty, she turns outside again, where she sees Jesus standing, and takes him for the gardener. "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Jesus prepares her gently by the further question. But she is utterly absorbed in her quest: "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him". He says one word: Mary! She turns right round and "says to him in Hebrew, Rabboni. That is to say: Master!" St John has quoted the exact word she used, more solemn than "Rabbi", and often addressed to God.

And now Jesus is going to send this great lover, the contemplative whose single-mindedness he had defended, to her mission as apostle of the Apostles. Into that mission her womanly powers of loving are to be turned. The translation "do not touch me" misses the point, and suggests the extraordinary idea that he who had let her touch him at the supper in Bethany and also, perhaps, in the house of the Pharisee (Lk. VII.36-50) would not do so now. Besides, it is a bad

version. The present imperative means, "Do not keep clinging on to me", and the reason is that the Ascension has not yet happened, but will happen soon, so that he is sending her to prepare the Apostles by telling them the fact of his Resurrection, and that he will ascend to his Father—preparing them, then, for the separation which will lift their minds to heaven. "Do not keep clinging on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brethren, and say to them : I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God". Mary went at once, and we have her vivid message : "I have seen the Lord, and this is what he said to me" (XX.II-18). It is a woman, a contemplative, transformed by the sight of the Risen Jesus, who is the active witness and apostle of Jesus to the men. History will often tell the same tale.

Thomas, the doubter, is like thousands of those turned out by our modern technical colleges : a good-hearted fellow, who will believe only what he sees and touches. When Jesus announces that he will return to the dangers of Judaea for the sake of the already dead Lazarus, Thomas, quite uninterested in any idea of a miracle, shows nevertheless a touching, dog-like devotion, and rallies the reluctant disciples, saying, "Let us go too, that we may die with him" (XI.16). When at the Last Supper Jesus tells his sorrowing disciples that he is going to leave them, adding, "And you know the way to where I go", Thomas, his unperceptive common-sense quite on edge by this time, exclaims not very respectfully : "Lord, we do not know where you are going ; and how can we know the way?" And then Jesus in reply gives the matter-of-fact man just what he needs : a way which is a Person whom he can follow and believe and live by—"I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life". After the Resurrection the very man who so needed to see and touch Jesus was not there when the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples—probably he was the chief sceptic about the news brought by Mary Magdalen and had gone off to hide with his own grief, for he had not in the end even attempted to die with him. When told of the appearance of Jesus, his scepticism becomes increasingly neurotic : "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe". He probably flung out from the Eleven, and perhaps the words that after eight days "Thomas was with them" suggest that he was just creeping back after his sulk. And now it is the sceptic who makes the profession of faith which is the culmination of St John's Gospel (for the next chapter seems to be a sort of appendix, perhaps added later). Such is the power of the Resurrection. There are several lessons to be drawn. First, the evident one of the merit of faith, shown in Jesus' gentle,

smiling reproof: "Is it because you have seen me that you have believed? Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed". Second, the point made by St Gregory the Great, that St Thomas's incredulity brought forth a proof which helps us to believe better than the easy acceptance of the Magdalen; so we cannot do better than present the sceptic with the case for the truth of the Resurrection. But I suggest that there is a third point which is valuable and may be overlooked. Jesus gave Thomas exactly what his character asked: a proof from touch and sight (though Thomas probably did not touch him); and so he made of this good-hearted man a fervent believer. Do we use this method sufficiently in dealing with the products of an education in the physical sciences? Are we inclined to say "that man's a sceptic who will never believe, and without belief, there is nothing to be done"? Should we not rather enable him to see Christ living in his members—in a television of the Mass, in a Catholic institution, or just in an ordinary holy Christian? It was for Thomas that Jesus made that second appearance and every detail answered his demands. "Then he said to Thomas: Bring thy finger here, and see my hands, and bring thy hand and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing. Thomas answered, and said to him: My Lord and my God".

There is a certain danger that we may so concentrate on the proofs of Christianity triumphantly afforded by the Resurrection, that we forget its inner significance for our own lives and for the life of the Church. To understand what this is, we need to go to our Lord's great Discourse at the Last Supper (XIII.31-XVII.26). For there Jesus opened his mind to his disciples to tell them the meaning of his Passion and Resurrection, and of the coming of the Holy Spirit who would complete his work. The Jewish feast of the Passover commemorated the passing of the People of God, after the sacrificial meal of the Paschal Lamb, from Egypt, land of sin and slavery, through the "baptism" of the Red Sea to God's Land of Promise. On the way they were given the Ten Commandments. Jesus, about to pass from this world to his Father, offers himself in sacrifice for his own in a last feast of love, and gives himself to them in communion before consummating his union with them in suffering and death. But death was not the final word, for the consummation of his sacrifice according to his Father's will was the passing to his Father. "If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father". After the Resurrection Jesus is in the glory of his Father, and his prayer is fulfilled: "And now do thou glorify me, Father". Into this glory, this union in love of Father and Son, the Divine Redeemer brings his disciples and all those who through their word will believe in him.

This unity will be the sign of his divine mission. "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one". Here is the inner picture of the Church of the Risen Christ, as it shines out also in the First Epistle of St John.

On the way to the Promised Land the Israelites had been given the Ten Commandments. While celebrating his own Passover, Jesus gave them his own new commandment: "That you love one another as I have loved you". The Commandments are transformed. What is commanded is no longer a set of prohibitions, but a positive love, for love fulfils the whole Law (Gal. v.14; Rom. xiii.8), and this love goes further, becoming a love modelled on Christ's own love unto death (xv.13). St John's First Epistle shows it at work in the Church (I Jn. ii.8; iii.11, 16), as do all martyrdoms. It is a commandment of joy, for "these things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be filled". And it is after calling forth a declaration of love, that Christ entrusts his Church to Peter in the loving terms of a shepherd and his sheep (xxi.15-17). Do we sufficiently understand and bring out the connection between the love commanded by Christ and the place of Peter in the Church? St Ignatius of Antioch describes the Roman Church as "presiding over the Love". It is this presentation which attracts many of our separated brethren. For the unity of the Church is not only a great Fact showing her divine origin, but a Fact of Love. But for each of us the Commandment remains, and we, with our free will, will manifest the unity in proportion as we love.

But how are the disciples to know that the Risen Christ dwells in them and they in him? "By this we know that he abides in us: by the Spirit whom he has given us" (I Jn. iii.24). And again, "it is in this that we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit". After all, Thomas, when he cried "My Lord and my God", saw only the Risen Man who had been crucified. We come, then, to the consummation of Christ's work, the giving of the Spirit. We are so accustomed to speaking of the effect of our Lord's teaching and example that we may forget that he himself said that it was not enough. "I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go I will send him to you. . . . I have still many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth. . . . he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine, and declare it to you" (xvi.7-14). Jesus had already spoken twice in his discourse of the "other Advocate". The Paraclete, or Advocate, whether Christ or "the other Paraclete", is not primarily the "Comforter". The Greek

word is the equivalent of the Latin *ad-vocatus*, and the original meaning (though extended by this time, cf. I Jn. II.1, where it is applied to Christ as intercessor) is of an advocate who came to the aid of a man who had to plead in court (and in Greece had to make his own speech, which the advocate composed for him and doubtless told him now to make). So while our word "comforter" implies that the other person remains wholly passive, the "advocate" is one who instructs and helps a man to stand on his own feet and bear witness to the truth of his case. The Apostles, who were natural witnesses to Christ because they had known him in his life on earth, were to be enlightened and strengthened by the Divine Advocate who inspired them.

We cannot understand the promise of the Spirit in the Last Discourse or his work in the Church of the Risen Christ except in the perspectives of Pentecost, when Christ sent the Holy Spirit in fullness to complete his redemptive work. The effect of his coming, both at Pentecost and through all the history of the Church to our own day, has been to instruct, fill with love, strengthen and send forth the witnesses to Christ's life and Resurrection (cf. I Jn. IV.13, 14). St John knew this very well when he transcribed the Discourse, although the account of Pentecost was outside his scope. But what he does record is the first glad imparting of the Spirit by the risen Redeemer to the Apostles that they may continue his mission of forgiveness. "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you" (xx.21). Then he breathes upon them, a sign since the creation of man, of the giving of life (cf. Gen. II.7). "You will see me", he had said, "because I live and you will live. In that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you" (xiv.19-20; cf. Eph. III.17). And he gives them the Holy Spirit that they too may give spiritual life by remitting sins—a power to be used not capriciously, but humanly. All the supernaturality of St John is shot through with humanism. So when he had breathed upon them, he said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained".

Thus St John's narrative of the Resurrection Days is given, with memories of the Passion, with examples of the tender love of Jesus, to each according to his need and character, and with the beginning of that life of the Spirit, which is to be the soul of the Church and of each of her members and the inspiration of their charity and their apostolate. As ever in St John grace and nature join in love, and the least things mingle with the highest. "Simon Peter, dost thou love me? Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep".

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BOOKS RECEIVED

(The mention of books in this list neither implies nor precludes
subsequent review)

The Holy Bible, tr. R. Knox. Burns Oates, London 1955. Pp. 288. 30s.

The definitive edition, for which certain verbal revisions have been made.

The New Testament, Revised Standard Version. Illustrated edition. Nelson, London 1955. Pp. 293, plates 8. 12s 6d net.

Les Psaumes, tr. R. Tournay, O.P. (*La Bible de Jérusalem*). Nouvelle édition. Les Editions du Cerf, Paris 1955. Pp. 520. 1,200 fr.

R. E. Brown, S.S., *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*, St Mary's University, Baltimore 1955. Pp. xiv+161. \$2.00.

An examination of the theological senses given to Holy Scripture by Christian exegesis, and a defence of the *Sensus Plenior*. "There remains a deeper sense of the text itself (therefore not typical) which was not clearly foreseen by the human author (therefore not strictly literal) but was intended by God. This is our *sensus plenior*" (p. 149).

H. H. Rowley, *The Book of Ezekiel in Modern Study*. The John Rylands Library, Manchester MCMLIII. Pp. 45. 3s 6d net.

After considering the recent hypotheses the distinguished author concludes: "I find greater unity in the book of Ezekiel than in Isaiah or Jeremiah, though I do not think we ought to regard the book as compiled in its present form by the prophet himself. Its materials probably go back to him or to his disciples and were drawn on by a later editor, who supplied little that he did not find in his sources. The ministry of Ezekiel I would place wholly in Babylonia in the period immediately before and after the fall of Jerusalem".

J. Straubinger, *Tobias, Bibelstunden* 2.Band. Kath. Bibel-Werk, Stuttgart 1955. Pp. 84. DM 2.50.

Numeri und Deuteronomium, Die Heilige Schrift für das Leben erklärt, Band II/1. K. F. Kramer. Herder, Freiburg 1955. Pp. xiv+610. Price not stated.

Founded on sound critical scholarship, this work aims at emphasising what is valuable for the Christian life today.

S. J. Brown, S.J., *Image and Truth: Studies in the Imagery of the Bible*. Officium Libri Catholici, Rome 1955. Pp. 161. Price not stated.

J. Chaine, *God's Herald*, tr. B. McGrath, O.S.B. Wagner & Herder, New York & London 1955. Pp. xiv+236. 24s.

A translation of *Introduction à la lecture des Prophètes*, first published in 1946, and received enthusiastically.

BOOKS RECEIVED

G. Ricciotti, *The History of Israel*, tr. C. della Penta, O.P. & R. T. A. Murphy, O.P., vols. I & II. Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee 1955. Pp. 906. \$15.00.

An American translation of *Storia d'Israele*, which has enjoyed great success since it first appeared fifteen years ago. Without doubt this is the best Catholic history of the chosen people, and is most valuable for teachers who wish to supplement the rather meagre outlines which usually serve as school text-books.

J. Guittou, *The Problem of Jesus*. Burns Oates, London 1955. Pp. 239. 21s.

The author's own abridgment for English readers of his two volumes on *Le Problème de Jésus*, published in 1948 and 1953. He considers first the evidence and its historical value, and then the Divinity of Christ and his Resurrection.

A. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff 1955. Pp. viii + 155. 12s 6d net.

A study of the psalms celebrating the Kingship of Yahweh and of the so-called royal psalms, within the context of a cultic royal festival.

D. W. Gooding, *Recensions of the Septuagint Pentateuch*. Tyndale Press, London 1955. Pp. 24. 1s 6d.

W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch*. Tyndale Press, London 1955. Pp. 23. 1s 6d.

The Rankin Lecturer in Hebrew and Semitic Languages in the University of Liverpool rejects stylistic criteria as valid evidence for plural authorship. "There would seem to exist no valid objection to accepting Genesis as a literary unit, the work of a single author".

L. E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. Review and Herald, Washington 1950-4. Pp. 3,965. \$22.50 plus price of vol. IV, not stated.

This immense work on the historical development of prophetic interpretation is by a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary of Washington. It examines at prodigious length the interpretation of biblical prophecies (viz. the apocalypses of Daniel and John) from the Apostolic Fathers to the end of the nineteenth century. There have been in every age people obsessed by the apocalyptic writings, but we doubt whether they have ever supported their claims with such a mass of misdirected research. To take just one example, we learn that Dr Adoniram J. Gordon wrote: "[I] avow my conviction that the papal 'Man of sins' was accurately photographed on the camera of prophecy thousands of years ago; no detective searching for him today would need any other description of him than that which is found on the pages of the Bible. Taking these photographs of Daniel and John and Paul, and searching the world upside down for their originals, I am confident that this same detective would stop at the Vatican, and after gazing for a few moments at the Pontiff, who sits there gnawing the bone of infallibility, which he acquired in 1870, and clutching for that other bone of temporal sovereignty which he lost the very same year, he would lay his hand on him and say: 'You are wanted in the court of the Most High to answer to the indictment of certain souls beneath the altar'". Dr Froom finds this a "remarkable affirmation". So do we!

